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MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS
BOSTON

CHINESE AND JAPANESE ART

Japanese Paintings and Lacquer

1914

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GALLERY BOOK

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SECRETARY

CHINESE AND JAPANESE ART.

VII. Japanese.

Ashikaga (1337-1582). Tokugawa (1603-1868).

The interior fittings of this room, like those of the other galleries of the Department, are in accordance with the spirit of Japanese architecture, but are not imitated from any model.

The sliding screens with transparent paper which cover the windows are called Shoji, and are in general use in Japan.

Any large Japanese room is very commonly provided with a broad niche, or Tokonoma. Works of art are shown in such a niche, instead of being disposed about the room as with us.

The Japanese often leave woodwork unpainted, finding, in the tint and grain of the wood, sources of decorative effect.

Beams reënforcing each other at a little distance are also a common feature of Japanese architecture.

The Kakemono, or upright picture (to be hung) and the Makimono, or horizontal picture (to be unrolled) take the place in Japan of our easel pictures and mural paintings, for which the movable walls of Japanese houses offer no place.

CHINESE AND JAPANESE ART.

VII. Japanese.

1 & 2. Six-fold screen representing spider monkeys.
Painted by Hasegawa Tohaku, of the School of Sesshiu, late 16th century.

The long-armed monkeys are not natives of Japan, but are copied by Japanese artists from Chinese pictures. Yet their strongly marked faces and indefinite bodies on these screens correspond to the impression given by the living animal in our zoölogical gardens. Tohaku called himself the fifth descendant of Sesshiu.

In Screen 1, four of the monkeys are crouched on the slanting trunk of a great tree. A fifth hangs by one arm from a branch, and holds a baby monkey suspended from one foot.

In Screen 2, one monkey, squatted on the ground among leafage, balances another on his shoulder. A third, hanging from the branch of a tree and with one foot against the trunk, stretches out the other hand toward a fourth, seated below with crossed arms.

3. The Zen Monk Bukan and his Tiger.
Painted by Motonobu (1477-1559), the head of the Kano School of Japanese artists.

The paintings of Motonobu are monochrome sketches dashed off with extraordinary facility.

One of the marks of the spiritual elevation sometimes attained by the Zen priesthood was their sympathy with animals and power over them. The monk Bukan is said to have tamed and made a pet of a tiger; and is commonly represented with the animal.

In flowing robes, the saint stands under the branches of a pine tree and carries a palm leaf fan. His knitted brow and parted lips express intense absorption in thought. His feet and wrists and bosom are hairy, and his ears have spreading, heavy lobes. The tiger glares sidewise, lashes his tail, and impatiently raises his right paw.

4. White-robed Kwannon on a Dragon.
Painted in the style of Sesshiu (1421-1507).

Clothed in a diaphanous robe drawn up over the

head, the divinity sits with hands clasped about his knee. Through the transparent halo appear convolutions of the dragon's body. His grotesque head and forepaw appear below, and his tail above.

Sesshiu's style is even more Chinese than that of the first Kano artists, for unlike them, he had visited China itself, deriving his instruction, as he said from the mountains only. He painted mostly in monochrome, using a comparatively few uncorrected strokes. Of this manner he is called the originator in Japan.

5. Keikaboku, the Astrologer, with an incarnation of the Taoist divinity and an attendant.
By Masanobu (1424-1520), the founder of the Kano School.

The high ideas which appear to be the real essence of Taoism are mixed with the most commonplace, material notions. In the monstrous human being which here accompanies the astrologer, it is hard to see the divinity of which the Chinese legend tells. Keikaboku, one of the Immortal Men of the Mountains called Sennin, one day told his servants to prepare his study for an important guest and not to enter during the interview. The guest proved the extraordinary shape shown in the picture; and his talk with Keikaboku was carried on in an unknown language. Upon his departure Keikaboku revealed the fact that the visitor was an incarnation of the Supreme Heavenly Ruler, the sole deity of Taoism. It is said that a few years later Keikaboku disappeared, no one knew where.

The divinity carries a scroll. The astrologer carries a feather fan, and his high cloth cap emphasizes by contrast the towering skull of his companion.

6. The Four Sages of the Shang Mountains (Shozan).
By Naonobu, of the Kano School (died 1650), fourth in descent from Motonobu.

Four men of venerable aspect. The one with a staff stands watching another read from a scroll; a third stands apart looking toward them, and the head of the fourth appears from behind the trunk of a large pine tree under which the group is gathered. The Four Sages were wise men of the Ching Dynasty (221-206 B. C.) who retired to the mountains to escape the political disturbances that preceded the establishment of the Han Dynasty in 206 B. C.

7. Poh I (Hakui) and Shuh Ts'i (Shikusei). By Naonobu of the Kano School (died 1650).

These were two brothers who, after the fall of the Shang Dynasty in 1122 B. C., declined to serve under the new power, the Dynasty of Chou, out of fealty to the former régime. They took refuge in the Sheu-yang Mountain, where they lived on the young shoots of ferns. The fern-shoots just uncurling are represented in the basket between them.

According to a variation of the story, their father wished to confer the succession upon Shuh T'si, the younger, but he declined to accept his brother's birthright and disappeared. Poh I in turn rejected the inheritance under the plea that he ought not to act against his father's wish, and also withdrew, leaving the succession to a third brother. He joined Shuh T'si in a life of seclusion, and the two passed the rest of their days in fraternal and intellectual communion.

LACQUER.

Lacquer is a kind of varnish applied to articles made of wood. The art of lacquer decoration is practised extensively in China and Japan, the most beautiful work being the Japanese. The lacquer coating is often combined with other materials - mother-of-pearl, lead, or coral. The finest lacquer ornamentation is in gold, and is distinguished by its delicacy of workmanship and beauty and complexity of design. The objects to which it is applied are themselves finely wrought, and are made to last for centuries by a heavy covering of the varnish applied in many coats, the process often lasting years.

16th to 18th centuries.

8. Writing Case. Water-wheel in a rapid stream. The metal representation of the wheel has been lost, as well as the drop of quick-silver placed in it in order to represent by its rapid motion when the box was handled, the flow of the stream.
The side compartments contain writing brushes.
Ozaki Ryosei, middle 17th century.

9. Inro. Plum tree in mist.
Early 18th century.

10. Writing case. Chrysanthemums appearing over a garden fence.
Igarashi Doho I., late 16th century.

11. Box. The shape of the box represents the way letters were tied up in old Japan, instead of being put into envelopes.
Early 18th century.

12. Square box. Three rabbits, of gold, of mother-of-pearl and lead.
Early 18th century.

13. Round box. Chrysanthemums in coral.
Early 18th century.

14. Round box. Chrysanthemums in mother-of-pearl.
Middle 17th century.

15. Oblong box. Wild geese alighting.
Early 18th century.

16. Writing case. Seaside landscape, on a chequered pattern.
Koami Choan, late 16th century.

17. Round box. Orange branches.
Middle 16th century.

18. Incense pillow. The Japanese pillow consists of a wooden support with a cushion upon it. The present head-rest is perforated to permit the escape of incense burned inside. The ornament is an elaborate landscape running around the four sides and up over the top.
Middle 17th century.

GALLERY VII. LACQUER, 19-28.

19. Inro. A horse caparisoned for a ceremonial occasion.

Yamada Joka I., late 17th century.

20. Box. An angel, or Bodhisattva, in clouds. An ancient lacquer panel has been cut up into sections to make this box.

12th century.

21. Square box. Chrysanthemums.

Early 16th century.

22. Square box. Autumn flowers.

Early 16th century.

23. Irregular box. The shape is that of three clam shells lying together. The landscape decoration shows a torii, or gateway of honor, a bridge and a shrine in an enclosure.

17th century.

24. Two round boxes. Chrysanthemums and other flowers.

Middle 16th century.

25. Inro. Crows in a wood.

Kajikawa (probably the second of the name), middle 17th century.

17th and 18th centuries.

26. Writing case. The flat, square boxes on this table are writing cases (Suzuri-bako). The present case bears on the cover a design of chrysanthemums against a background of hills. The decoration within forms a single landscape showing a river over the shoulder of a mountain with a grove of trees. In the foreground flowering bushes and trees rise among undulations. The central compartment is the inkstone on which the cake of (India) ink is ground as needed with a drop of water from the holder which should occupy the bronze receptacle at the front of the case.

Early 18th century.

27. Case for a fan, or a flute, with the fabled bird called Howo.

28. Writing case in the form of an open fan. The little fan is the water-holder. The round boxes

contain seals for stamping documents in ink. (See the kakemonos in the central niche opposite). Middle 18th century.

29. Inro, or medicine box; to be carried by the cord in the belt. A fisherman is drawing his net. His torso is in porcelain, the boat in lead. He draws a large net, stretched on bamboo poles. Iizuka Toyo I.

30. Inro. Two sweetmeat boxes in the form of little dogs. The horizontal curving lines show where the boxes are supposed to open. The face of one of the dogs is of porcelain. Haritsu II., middle 18th century.

31. Box, to contain a collection of poems. The decoration represents Howo on a background of gold-dust. Japanese poems are always very short, and could easily be written on a single sheet of the size of this box. The title of the collection - such as "Poems of the Emperor * * " - was originally inscribed on the lid. The characters were partly effaced before its sale, to conceal the provenance of the box, and cannot now be read. Early 18th century.

32. Box, with metal handle. The decoration represents a garden of chrysanthemums, under the full moon. Middle 17th century.

33. Writing case. Village on the seacoast. Middle 18th century.

34. Octagonal box with a garden of chrysanthemums. Early 19th century.

35. Inro. A grove of bamboo, the stems in mother-of-pearl. The opposite side depicts the Seven Wise-Men of the Bamboo Grove. These sages represent a movement away from Confucian convention and toward independent simplicity of life which occurred after the fall of the Han Dynasty in the third century A. D. Except for conversing with each other by the tongue instead of with a public by the pen, they were counterparts of Thoreau in the Walden Woods. Shiomi Kohei, early 18th century.

36. Writing case. Ivy vine with bamboo hamper for carrying on the back. Shunsho Kogemasa, late 17th century.

GALLERY VII. LACQUER, 37 AND 38.

HEIJI MONOGATARI ROLL, 39.

37. Inro. Circus riders performing their acts. The carved ball is the netsuke which serves to hold the inro when carried in the belt. (See the collection of elaborately carved netsukes in Gallery IX.).

Middle 18th century.

38. Writing case. Quail among millet.
Middle 18th century.

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39. The Heiji Monogatari Roll. About 1200 A. D.
Makemono (roll picture) on paper.

The event depicted in this painting contributed to mark an epoch in Japanese history.

Although the imperial line of Japan is the oldest in the world, the authority of the Mikado was for centuries nominal only. The real ruler of the nation was a military despot called the "Shogun" or great general, who governed in the name of the Emperor and with his acquiescence. This unique political system was the ultimate outcome, in 1190 A. D., of the so-called "Heiji" era of civil warfare in 1157, between two Imperial Councillors, each aiming at supreme command through possession of the person of the Emperor. The present roll tells the story of the burning of the Sanjo Palace at midnight, December 9th, 1157, by one of the rivals, and the abduction of the Ex-Emperor, who resided there. Although both the Emperor and the ex-Emperor later escaped and their abductor was slain, his partisans eventually became the founders of the first dynasty of Shoguns, called the Kamakura line. This was followed by the Ashikaga and the Tokugawa lines, the latter lasting until 1868, when the last Shogun abdicated and the Mikado became again sole ruler.

The center of the roll depicts the abduction, the burning of the palace and the slaughter of the attendants. In the courtyard on the right of the flames, the cart which is to carry away the ex-Emperor is seen backed into a doorway among a crowd of warriors. In the courtyard on the left of the flames, the helpless attendants are seen flying or falling before the invaders. Some of the women seek to escape by throwing themselves into a well. Outside the courtyard the victorious soldiery , their aim accomplished, are seen moving away leisurely guarding the bullock cart with the ex-emperor, some carrying pikes with the heads of their enemies.

Outside the courtyard on the right there is a mad rush of court officials in bullock carts, with attendants and soldiery summoned in confusion by the news of the disaster. The two extremes of the picture represent the two sequels of the scene of violence to which the center is devoted.

The inscriptions at the ends of the roll are a contemporary account of the picture, a part of which may be translated as follows:

"It was about midnight of the 9th day of December in the first year of the Heiji era (1157) when Councillor Fujiwara Nobuyori, leading a troop of several hundred under Minamoto Yoshitomo, attacked the Sanjo Palace, where the ex-Emperor Goshirakawa lived, and took possession of all gates. Nobuyori proceeded on horseback to the garden of the South Pavilion and thus exclaimed:

'On account of the slander by Shinsei (his rival) your Majesty intends to slay me, I understand. But desiring to retain my life for a little longer, I shall flee away to the East. Yet how sad do I feel to leave the capital, after my long period of service, and after having so long enjoyed the great favor of your Majesty.

The ex-Emperor with much surprise replied:

'What is this? Who would wish to lose you?'

At that moment Lord Koronaka called the bullock-cart, and Nobuyori forced his Majesty into it, with the words

'The Sanjo Palace will be set on fire!'

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Thereupon, the Princess Joseimonin, the ex-Emperor's sister, was placed in the same carriage, and with him transferred to the Imperial Palace, where they were imprisoned under guard in the Censor's Office.

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The Sanjo Palace is already on fire, and burning flames and bursting smoke overshadow its magnificence. There is no way for the court nobles and the ladies but to die. They must either be burnt or murdered. Those who escape the arrows cannot avoid the fire.

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The news that Yoshitomo has revolted and attacked the Sanjo Palace spreads all about. Some insist that the ex-Emperor is in the fire, while some declare that his Majesty has been taken to the Imperial Palace. The Grand Duke,

the Regent and other Lords and court dignitaries rush in carts or on horseback to the Sanjo Palace. The confusion and agitation sound like reverberating thunder. The tumult is heard in heaven and re-echoed on the earth."

The present roll is one of a number called "Heiji Monogatari" or "Tales of the Heiji Era" which were painted to record various incidents of the struggle of thaf period. Of this series but three remain. One is devoted to an earlier triumph of Nobuyori - the procession in which the head of his rival Shinsei was carried through the streets of Kyoto; the other to the first incident in his downfall - the escape of the Emperor to the Rokuhara Mansion. Both are owned by noblemen in Japan.

The roll appears to have been painted within a generation or two after the events it depicts. The painter was an eye-witness, if not of this very scene, of others like it; and may at least have mingled with those who could remember the event. His work is a contemporary picture of war in Japan seven centuries ago, reproducing for the after-world the men and methods of that day as the painter saw them daily. At the time it was produced the art of painting had not yet been born in Europe; and for generations afterward there was no hand in the Western world with a tithe of the skill shown by this unknown artist.

The roll is sometimes attributed to a master of the Tosa School, called Sumyoshi Keion (1166-1237). There are no certain records of him, and by some his existence is doubted.